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Gunfire and London's Media Reality

Listening to Distance between Piano, Newspaper, and Theater

GAVIN WILLIAMS

... [T]heirs was a paper empire: an empire built on a series of flimsy pretexts that were always becoming texts.

—Thomas Richards (1993)

Acres of printed words issued forth from London's nineteenth-century printing presses, a thick seam that survives into our own time in ever greater accessibility. I begin with a fossil found along the coalface: a remnant of the popular music industry, a few unloved pages. Largely ignored since 1854, the year of its printing, the work was pressed into the British Museum Library's national archive, a copyright depository since 1814.¹ It was published on 6 November by sheet-music vendor and piano manufacturer Jewell & Letchford of Soho Square. An occasional work very much of its moment, this piano piece was the by-product of a newspaper story announcing Britain's first, victorious engagement in Crimea. Written for solo piano by one J. Mayer, a composer now virtually unknown, it bears the title "Grand Military Funeral March of the Battle of the Alma." The battle itself took place on 20 September, but news reached the metropolis only twenty days later, after a protracted journey over land and by sea.² Telegrams

¹ After 1814, British publishers were required to deliver a copy of all books for onward transmission to the British Museum. Following the Imperial Copyright Act of 1842, the Museum's reach was further extended. This new law required the "best issue of every book when it was first published" to be given to the Museum within one calendar month if published in London, within three months if published elsewhere in Britain, and within a year if published within the Empire's dominions. However, the farther from London publication took place, the more difficult enforcement of the law became. See Philip Rowland Harris, *A History of the British Museum Library, 1753–1973* (London: British Library, 1998), 148. See also Thomas Richards, *The Imperial Archive: Knowledge and the Fantasy of Empire* (London: Verso, 1993), 11–44.

² For the first installment of William Howard Russell's report on the Battle of Alma, see "From Our Special Correspondent," *The Times* (10 Oct. 1854), 7–8; an excerpt from Russell's report

had, of course, arrived much more quickly, but were not fully believed. In the wake of the Battle, further telegrams announced (falsely, as it would turn out) the capture of Sevastopol, prompting Britons to speculate that the Crimean War might already be coming to an end.³

Talk of war's end was smoothly replaced in the public mind by details of Alma's many casualties. In the wake of these reports, the "Funeral March" prepared to go to press.⁴ But beyond its close relation to political events, more information is impossible to trace. We do not know where and when it was played in 1854. No sign of its reception survives, so far as I can tell: what chatter it may have generated may be forever lost. Like many other popular piano pieces of the period, it has enjoyed a peaceful entombment within Britain's national archive, remaining ignored and untouched since it was deposited there more than a century ago. This quick obscurity is no great tragedy, or even particularly surprising. Such loss is, after all, the rule for the kind of popular culture we have inherited from the nineteenth century, in which ripples both large and small tend to be short lived. Looking back now, though, we may be struck by the work's lively imbrication within Britain's popular, mediatized culture: evidence that seems strange, even uncanny, suggesting a fast-paced world now long dead. The environment within which the piece appeared offers clues as to its function and meaning. For one thing, the musicalization of a recent battle presented a quandary within what we would nowadays call public relations.⁵ The decorative swirls and colored lithographs that usually adorned sheet music covers were banished: in their place came a stark, black-rimmed title page resembling a magnified death notice

appeared the previous day, "Arrival of the Wounded in the Bosphorus," *The Times* (9 Oct. 1854), 8; on the time taken for Crimean letters to reach England, see Elizabeth Grey, *The Noise of Drums and Trumpets: W. H. Russell Reports from the Crimea* (London: Longmans, 1971), 92–93.

³ In early October, newspapers reported the fall of Sevastopol; see, for example, *Morning Post* (3 Oct. 1854), 4. However, three days later, they were obliged to admit that this was not in fact the case. For further discussion of this mistake, and its correction, see later in this chapter. *Morning Post* (3 Oct. 1854), 4; *Morning Chronicle* (3 Oct., 1854), 4–5; *The Times* (2 Oct. 1854), 6.

⁴ The British Museum Library's entry stamp marks the "Funeral March" as received on 6 November 1854, but it must have been printed (and was perhaps being sold) earlier.

⁵ As the "Funeral March" appeared on the sheet-music market, famous conductor Louis-Antoine Jullien presented a similarly topical "Alma Quadrille" at the Drury Lane Theatre. We can get a sense of the kind of snide comments that lighthearted commemorations of the battle could call forth from the review of a performance, published in *The Standard*: "The first performance took place last night, and there were multitudes of persons present to listen to the musical details of blood and slaughter, and applaud in proportion to the noise. [...] The bustle and motion of a fierce bodily struggle, mingled with peals of ordnance, and the shouts of victors, furnish M. Jullien with a caucus, which he fills up with a wonderful exuberance of detail; and there is every contrivable suggestiveness in the issue. The forces of the orchestra are of course multiplied for the occasion, and the power of sound, in its literal and material sense, can go no further." *The Standard* (4 Nov. 1854), 1.

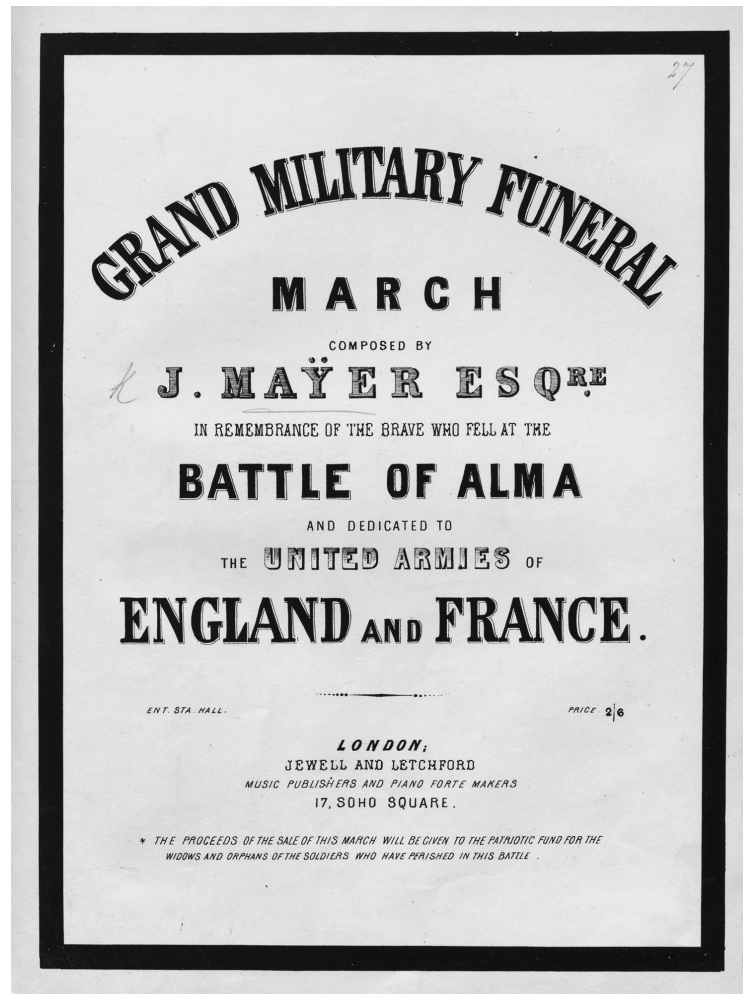


Figure 3.1 J. Mayer, “Grand Military Funeral March of the Battle of the Alma.” Soho Square, London: Jewell & Letchford, 1854: cover image. © British Library Board h.723.n.(27.); reproduced with permission.

(see Figure 3.1).⁶ Small print informed potential buyers that “the proceeds of the sale of this march will be given to the Patriotic Fund for the widows and

⁶ Commemorative maps and illustrations were also published; see Ulrich Keller, *The Ultimate Spectacle: A Visual History of the Crimean War* (Australia: Gordon & Breach, 2001), 43. More widely distributed, and perhaps serving as a model for the March’s typographical format, was the pamphlet containing the official list of the dead, wounded, and lost in battle, a publication that sold for a penny; see *List of Killed and Wounded at the Battle of the Alma on Wednesday, September 20, 1854, with the Official Sketch of the Battle Field, and Other Illustrations*, 5th ed. (London: Clarke & Beeton, 1854).

orphans of the soldiers who have perished in this battle”—perhaps an attempt to ward off anticipated complaints of opportunism and commercialism.

In some ways, this funeral march is an unremarkable example of the genre. It is couched in a stable minor mode and boasts a characteristically measured tempo; like so many funeral marches before and after, it is permeated by dotted rhythms; its harmony cleaves to the tonic, giving the usual sense of weight (see Figures 3.2a and 3.2b).⁷ However, close details reveal a more unusual kind of musical mournfulness. The first bar initiates a repeated operation: a rising arpeggio is followed by a crashing minor chord whose resonance is enhanced by the sustaining pedal. This repeated booming gesture is glossed by a footnote: “The bass is a continual imitation of the sound of cannon.”⁸ These blasts punctuate every measure, although as the piece progresses they are varied in volume and register. Occasionally, the ominous arpeggio is inserted (mm. 6–7, 29–30) or removed (mm. 3–4, 25–26) to randomize the impact. In more lyrical sections (notably in the major-key Trio, not reproduced here, but also in mm. 5–8 and 14–21) the cannonade is quieter, higher in register, and hence—perhaps—farther away. Yet the booms threaten to intrude whenever the introductory arpeggios return (mm. 13–14, 17–18). The psychological mechanism behind these sonic cues is crude, the march becoming a macabre game and a virtual battlefield in which the listener tries to predict when the missiles might fall.

The survival of London’s popular sheet music can broadly be attributed to the nineteenth century’s archival impulse: the period’s growing tendency to monitor, record, and memorialize itself.⁹ Throughout this book we have seen how that archival impulse shaped sounds and memories across spaces of empire, selectively preserving, ignoring, and obscuring. By following paper trails emanating from London, we can home in on the ways such operations of memory played out at the heart of one particular empire. Sheet music, like much other

⁷ For an in-depth discussion of the musical semiotics of the genre, see Lawrence Kramer, “Chopin at the Funeral: Episodes in the History of Modern Death,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 54/1 (2001), 97–125.

⁸ Elizabeth Morgan traces this piano gesture back to Franitsek Kotzwara’s well-known battle piece, “The Battle of Prague,” composed around 1788. See her “Combat at the Keys: Women and Battle Pieces for the Piano During the American Civil War,” *Nineteenth-Century Music* 40/1 (2016), 7.

⁹ Jürgen Osterhammel emphasizes the role of the archive in society’s self-observation during the nineteenth century; see his *The Transformation of the World: A Global History of the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014), 1–44. By contrast, according to Thomas Richards’s classic account, the archive should be primarily understood in terms of an imperial fantasy of control over distant parts of the world by means of data handling; see his *The Imperial Archive: Knowledge and the Fantasy of Empire* (London: Verso, 1993), 1–10. Both Osterhammel and Richards take inspiration from Michel Foucault’s discussion of archival practices in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Tavistock, 1986), 142–48.

FUNERAL MARCH .
OF THE BATTLE OF THE ALMA .

Composed by
J. MAYER.

1

LARGO .

521. The Bass is a continual Imitation of the sound of Cannon .

J. & L.

Figure 3.2a J. Mayer, "Grand Military Funeral March of the Battle of the Alma." Soho Square, London: Jewell & Letchford, 1854, 1. © British Library Board h.723.n.(27.); reproduced with permission.

print ephemera, has usually been preserved as single copies of what were batch-produced items. In more recent decades, the wide circulation of this music has returned in the shape of digitization, a process that has made much printed music freely available online. More often, the priorities and budgets of libraries have meant that researchers encounter nothing but musical metadata, input



Figure 3.2b J. Mayer, "Grand Military Funeral March of the Battle of the Alma." Soho Square, London: Jewell & Letchford, 1854: 2. © British Library Board h.723.n.(27.); reproduced with permission.

by latter-day librarians and archivists, the labor sometimes outsourced to the so-called developing world. Such information has rendered music instantly locatable via salient details: its composer, title, publisher, place and date of publication, and so on. Encoded thus, vast swathes of popular music long since

forgotten have returned to us, entering virtual spaces in which they begin to take on new contours.

In the context of the digital archive more broadly, musical metadata is a drop in the ocean: a fraction of nineteenth-century words available to us now. A useful point of comparison is with the period's newspapers, which represent a monumental achievement of early-twenty-first century digitization. In their virtual form, newspapers present us with huge, broken layers of information from the past.¹⁰ Amid these countless millions of words, musicologists have to date been largely concerned with reviews of performances: literary, often formulaic accounts of concerts, operas and the like, although concert reviews are only the most obvious way in which the newspaper and music industries intersected.¹¹ Another angle is suggested by the "Funeral March." As we have seen, it was written in response to unfolding news; its dedication to the Patriotic Fund forestalled censure from the public and the press, although Jewell & Letchford probably also hoped for free publicity, since the Patriotic Fund was, for several months, the subject of a daily column in *The Times*.¹²

Digital searches I have attempted suggest—but do not prove—that this particular "Funeral March" was not among the many newspaper advertisements printed in 1854; nor does the company's name or the work's title appear in the long columns dedicated to contributors to the Patriotic Fund that year.¹³ Yet the presence or absence of such data is ultimately less significant than the media environment within which it appeared. The "Funeral March" was a brief moment in a loop that began with the newspapers and ultimately aimed to return to them, and the sparks of recursion hint at larger patterns of the informational climate within 1850s news culture. On the one hand, we have an early phase in the history of the mass media: one that, according to Niklas Luhmann,

¹⁰ However, the results of keyword searches on digitized documents may be far from comprehensive, with the accuracy rates of optical character recognition for historical newspapers varying widely between 71 and 98%. See Rose Holley, "How Good Can It Get? Analysing and Improving OCR Accuracy in Large Scale Historical Newspaper Digitisation Programs," *D-Lib Magazine* 15/4 (2009), <<http://www.dlib.org/dlib/march09/holley/03holley.html>>.

¹¹ There were countless newspaper ads for the sheet-music trade. For example, during winter 1854—the most intensive period of Crimean fighting—Jewell & Letchford's most publicized piece was "The Silvery Shower," a fantasia for piano that had little to do with the war in progress. An ad for the piece appeared in *The Times* throughout September and October 1854; see for example, *The Times* (27 Sept. 1854), 13.

¹² *The Times* was the newspaper with the greatest circulation at the outbreak of the war. During winter 1854, there were also regular updates on the Royal Patriotic Fund in the *Morning Herald*, *Morning Post*, and *Daily News*, as well as in the regional papers.

¹³ At least one (perfunctory) advert appeared in a music journal; see "The Music Publisher's Circular," *The Musical World* 32/46 (London: Novello, 18 Nov. 1854), 765–66.

should be conceived as a socio-technical apparatus of cybernetic feedback.¹⁴ On the other, the prominent role accorded piano music in London's media marks an point of divergence between the then and the now, opening up a space for the historical imagination. To put all this another way, the piano both was and was not a wartime medium; it came into physical and cultural proximity with visual- and text-based media such as newspapers, books, broadsides, maps, cartoons, and prints, sharing some of the burden of spreading news of the war, while seeking to conserve a degree of musical autonomy and apartness from the violence of everyday life.

These disparities between music, image, and text in 1850s media culture played out within domestic spaces. Sheet music and newspapers were often consumed in adjacent ground-floor rooms. Countless historians describe the solidly middle-class environments within which the nineteenth-century piano was to be found. The instruments were often luxurious and, in the 1850s, still largely handmade; the pianists were—or so we are often told—mostly women.¹⁵ In nineteenth-century novels, women pianists all too often feature as social climbers and sexual self-promoters: mindless machinists who are simultaneously the objects of (hetero-) sexual consumption. The reality was, of course, rather different.¹⁶ As Elizabeth Morgan has shown, focusing on the years of the American Civil War, piano music was composed and performed by women to a variety of ends. Female music making was of a piece with increased participation within the broader wartime economy, embodying patriotic commitment and sometimes enacting opposition to the war. In the same way, the “Funeral March” allows for a spectrum of female action and interpretation. Most straightforwardly, the title cues grief over the fallen men of the country, and perhaps also for more personal losses, or for one's own sake. Yet, the music might also have conjured up the battle, transforming its players into virtual bombardiers. And there is no reason to restrict this kind of vicarious participation, and the

¹⁴ Niklas Luhmann, *The Reality of the Mass Media*, trans. Kathleen Cross (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000), 1–9.

¹⁵ While the social history of the piano in Britain has received a great deal of attention from scholars—the classic text here is Cyril Ehrlich's *The Piano: A History* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1990)—much less interest has accrued to the popular sheet-music industry the instrument supported. Some notable exceptions include Derek B. Scott, *The Singing Bourgeois: Songs of the Victorian Drawing Room and Parlour* (Milton Keynes, UK, and Philadelphia: Open University Press, 1989), 45–59; David Rowland, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to the Piano* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Dave Russell, *Popular Music in England, 1840–1914* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1998), 73–104; and Derek B. Scott, *Sounds of the Metropolis: The 19th-Century Popular Music Revolution in London, New York, Paris and Vienna* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 15–37.

¹⁶ See Ruth A. Solie, *Music in Other Words: Victorian Conversations* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 85–117.

performance of masculinity it entails, to women: such enactments were open to all middle-class performers and listeners at a remove from the battlefield.¹⁷ In providing an opening for emotional participation, the “Funeral March” invites us to ponder afresh music’s role within the 1850s news cycle: to ask why, in a news culture dominated by newspapers, musically simulated gunfire came to be a familiar virtual presence.

The archives surrender dozens more Alma-inspired compositions, including several that, although not engaging the battle topically, were published in its aftermath.¹⁸ Almost all were written for piano.¹⁹ They are mainly of the conventional “battle piece” variety, in that they commemorate a recent military achievement through a schematic narration of battleground events, and are thus connected to the tradition of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century battle symphonies. As Richard Will has pointed out, the battle symphony sought to draw listeners into formulaic retellings of an orderly, collective advance on the enemy. It called attention to precise rhythmic coordination among orchestral forces as a metaphor for lockstep discipline, leading to an inevitable crux: musical dissolution into chaos, often involving effects of gunshots and cannon fire.²⁰ This trajectory was also typical of nineteenth-century battle pieces for piano, their structure predicated on glorious victory (leaving mournful rumination to other genres).²¹ Often strident, even triumphalist in tone, battle pieces were inextricably tied to news events—their bombast contained within more precarious cultural timetables. In this sense, battle pieces provide a musical analogue for what Mary Favret has described as the dislocating temporalities of wartime

¹⁷ While I have not come across any accounts of contemporary piano music being exported, it is well known that print media in general flowed between Britain and Crimea. See, for example, Stefanie Markovits’s discussion of John Dalbiac Luard’s painting *A Welcome Arrival* (1857), which depicts the wall of an officer’s mess covered in maps and prints; *The Crimean War in the British Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 170–72.

¹⁸ To list only some of them: W. D. Glyde and G. P. R. Pulman, “The Ballad of Alma” (London: Jewell & Letchford, 1854); Stephen Glover, “National Music Played at the Battle of Alma, the ‘British Grenadiers,’ ‘Partant pour la Syrie,’ ‘La Marseillaise,’ ‘God Save the Queen,’ and ‘Rule Britannia’” (London: Charles Jeffreys, 1854); Charles William Smith, “The Alma Polka” (Liverpool, UK: John Smith, 1854); R. James and H. Austin, “The Battle of the Alma” (London: Jullien, 1854); William Wilson, “The Battle of the Alma Fantasia” (London: T. E. Purday, 1854); William Ireson, “The Alma March” (London: Campbell, Ransford, 1854); Charles Jefferys, “The Heroes of Alma” (London: Charles Jefferys, 1854).

¹⁹ Quadrilles also sometimes included an ad libitum cornet part: for example, Philippe Musard, “Schamyl” (London: Campbell, Ransford, 1854). See also Scott, *The Singing Bourgeois*, 172.

²⁰ Richard Will, *The Characteristic Symphony in the Age of Haydn and Beethoven* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 190–91.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 200–201.

at play within British culture more generally.²² In reliving events not long past and usually far from home, battle pieces recruited visceral effects to inscribe a sense of war's distance.

Consider, for example, "Alma: A Battle Piece for the Piano Forte," written by Albert Lindahl, a prolific French composer of piano music. The piece was published by Jullien & Co. and released in London more or less simultaneously with the "Funeral March."²³ Triumphalism begins with the front cover (there would be no funereal restraint here: see Figure 3.3).²⁴ It shows British and French armies, historical foes until recently, advancing together up an improbably steep hill in their joint attack on the Russians. This maneuver became instantly legendary, perhaps because it was the most distinctive moment within newspaper coverage. The British played a supporting role in the advance: a fact reflected in Figure 3.3 by the French flag, prominent in the foreground.²⁵ Further off, plumes of gunpowder smoke rise; in the background well-drilled files of soldiers dot the valley floor.

On turning the page, this picture converts into musical storytelling. The piece begins quietly, as though from far away, with a heavily syncopated march-like tune, supported in the left hand by bounding leaps—a standard accompaniment figure, but one exaggerated here through reaching down into the instrument's lowest register. Further marking their unusualness, these cavernous notes (the low B-flat in Figure 3.4a) are not reinforced at the octave, or by any harmony notes, at least initially. Over the course of the piece, however, as the volume gradually increases and the troops figuratively advance, this deep register fills out. As with the "Funeral March," the score of "Alma" makes explicit that the low blasts should be "imitating cannons" (see Figure 3.4b). Chordal acciaccaturas send cyclical shockwaves through the instrument, also stressing—by way of slightly undermining—the synchronicity with the right-hand melody.²⁶ Following this iteration of the march theme, the volume suddenly drops and a surprising new melody begins, the Napoleonic hymn "Partant pour la Syrie," which initiates another long crescendo, this time culminating in the decisive encounter. Then follow yet more cannon, sounding alone but now interspersed with urgent,

²² Mary Favret, *War at a Distance: Romanticism and the Making of Modern Wartime* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012), 49–52.

²³ The score received the British Library's entry stamp on 9 November 1854, three days after the Mayer's "Funeral March;" Albert Lindahl, "Alma: A Battle Piece for Piano" (London: Jullien, 1854).

²⁴ On the visual representation of the Battle of Alma in prints, see Keller, *The Ultimate Spectacle*, 41–70.

²⁵ This maneuver was led by Algerian Zouaves; see Orlando Figes, *The Crimean War: A History* (New York: Picador, 2010), 209.

²⁶ This was a typical strategy from representing military lockstep in the battle symphony; Will, *The Characteristic Symphony*, 193.

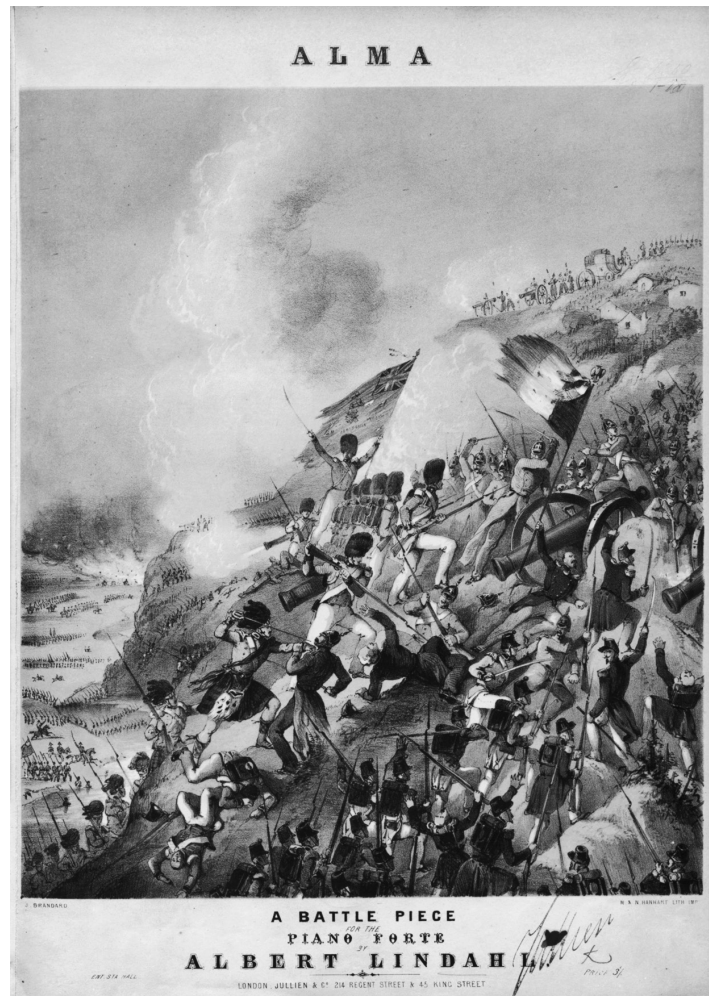


Figure 3.3 Albert Lindahl, "Alma: A Battle Piece for Pianoforte." London: Julien, 1854: cover image. © British Library Board h.1350.(1.); reproduced with permission.

darting scales.²⁷ The battle's conclusion is announced by horn signals and the victorious outcome affirmed by a medley of French and British national airs. To close, the march theme returns, but peters out in steady undulations in the low register as a final reminder of the blasting guns.

Beyond the piano works discussed so far, there were abundant, cannon-rich evocations of the Battle of Alma published and performed around this time. The

²⁷ Fast scales were conventional at moments of crisis in early-nineteenth-century melodrama; see Mary Ann Smart, *Mimomania: Music and Gesture in Nineteenth-Century Opera* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 64–65.



Figure 3.4a Albert Lindahl, “Alma: A Battle Piece for Pianoforte.” London: Jullien, 1854: 1, excerpt. © British Library Board h.1350.(1.); reproduced with permission.

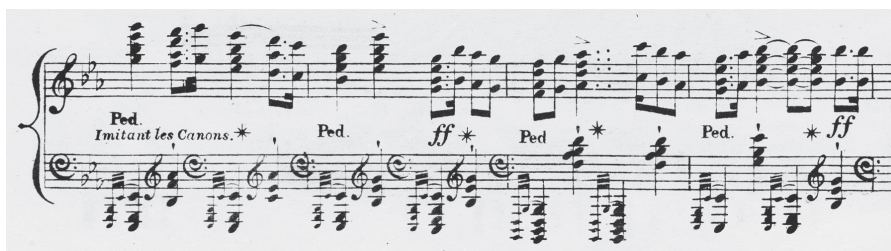


Figure 3.4b Albert Lindahl, “Alma: A Battle Piece for Pianoforte.” London: Jullien, 1854: 2, excerpt. © British Library Board h.1350.(1.); reproduced with permission.

ubiquity of cannon fire is not in itself surprising: it was a conventional signifier of the battlefield in late-eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century orchestral music and became a topos of the sublime.²⁸ What is more interesting here is the shift from orchestra to piano: a transposition of musical medium, involving a culturally specific complicity between noisy signifiers and news culture.

In the broadest sense, musicalized cannon fire called into being a national imagined community in a manner familiar in British cultural life since the eighteenth century (albeit one newly open to identification with French neighbors).²⁹ I have already noted the crude mechanism by which pianistic thuds fostered a sense of wartime patriotism, engendering emotional participation through performance of military masculinity. However, more fundamental interactions between musical actions and political events appear to have played out across the wider public sphere. In the wake of the Battle of Alma, the piano cannonade seems to have acquired a double signification—one poised between distinct modes of communication implied by “music” and the “news.” Bringing sounds

²⁸ Will, *The Characteristic Symphony*, 197–98.

²⁹ Benedict Anderson, *The Imagined Community: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 2006), 48. As Linda Colley points out, Britain’s patriotic imagined community was (and continues to be) inextricably bound to particular wars; see her *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707–1837* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2005), 5.

of war into the home, domesticating them both physically and mentally as musical entertainment, was one way of understanding them in 1854: as a staged repetition of noises originally conveyed by newspaper reports that filtered through the metropolis. In response to wartime news, pianos were imaginatively retooled to provide a sonic analog to the verbal signifiers of noise being channeled into the home by textual media, musical mimicry enhancing and enabling the battlefield realities communicated by printed news.

This interpretation takes its cue from cultural theories that stress the ways in which mimetic operations bubble beneath the surface of objective systems of representation. For Homi Bhabha, as for many other critics, mimicry provides the productive difference that endows the original with its prior status, thereby facilitating repetition and identity.³⁰ Mimicry fixates on a conspicuous detail of the original, establishing a relation to the represented object that conserves a power to challenge its identity. In a journalistic context such as the Battle of Alma, sounds supplied a part-for-whole relation to reality as it was reported and imagined: sounds of the battlefield contained within them the potential to disrupt the representational order introduced by the wartime newspaper press, giving rise to an ironic discourse that revealed journalistic reportage to be without secure foundation.

Within the wartime news ecology, the reverse also held true: musical representation of gunfire helped determine the delicate sense of reality constructed by the news. Not only did pianos and pianists channel wartime news, but, more fundamentally, news was also shaped by them. This notion goes against a critical tradition that has prevailed since the 1980s: theorists more used to focusing on visual rather than sonic media have repeatedly shown that news media have been, and continue to be, important for generating shared “views” of the world: consensual and coercive pictures of reality.³¹ In the case of wartime media, critical theory has tended to undermine the distinction between reality and its mediation. In Paul Virilio's celebrated claim, “the history of battle is the history of radically changing fields of perception.” By “changing fields” he meant constant innovation in the visual technologies that have been used to render war visible, whether on the battlefield or elsewhere.³²

Drawing inspiration from Virilio's ideas, and adapting their twentieth-century emphases for the purposes of the mid-nineteenth, Ulrich Keller has argued that

³⁰ Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 121–22. See also Michael Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity: A Particular History of the Senses* (London: Routledge, 1993), xiii–xiv.

³¹ See Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994), 59–60.

³² Paul Virilio, *War and Cinema: The Logistics of Perception*, trans. Patrick Camiller (London, Verso: [1984] 1989), 7.

the Crimean War was coextensive with its simulacrum in prints, cartoons, maps, and paintings: that the campaign took place not only on the battlefield, but also in the imagination of its spectators. He says, “armed conflicts are shot through with *signs*, and the processes of signification are shot through with *conflict*; war is, among other things, an aesthetic enterprise, and art, among other things, a site of battle.”³³ Yet Keller’s insistence that visual media continued the war by other means—in the imaginations and on the bodies of distant spectators—risks undermining radical differences between different wartime experiences. What is more, his position translates awkwardly if we are examining the war’s sounds, which suggest a different priority. Rather than assert the identity between fact and fiction, we need to inquire after the codes that made them legible in the first place, as obviously fictional indices of battlefield sound, on the one hand, and as symbolically real in the context of an ongoing war, on the other.³⁴ In 1850s London, guns and their sonic signifiers (verbal and/or musical) functioned as fuzzy objects that were useful for making sense of news; they could alternately blur and sharpen culturally sanctioned distinctions between reality and its mimed repetitions. Musical, literary, and (as we will see) theatrical noises were not the same as the sounds of gunfire in Crimea, even while their vibrating materiality partook of a fascination with their deadly origin.

The reality-bestowing power of noise could be felt, and heard in the imagination, in news stories such as those that reported the Battle of Alma. My opening paragraphs have already mentioned these stories, but to get at their sonic dimension we need to immerse ourselves in once sensational though now obscure details. As noted earlier, news of Britain’s victory at Alma was preceded by false reports of the capture of Sevastopol. The *Morning Post* announced the city’s fall on 3 October in a leader column on page 4: a column that, according to the usual format, followed the advertisements, domestic/commercial/shipping news, the weather forecast, and the theatrical listings.³⁵ The article reported 18,000 Russian casualties and the taking of 22,000 prisoners (reports in the coming days revealed both figures as vastly inflated). But the number of British and other casualties remained unknown. Tentatively—given the uncertainty over the scale of national grief to come—the *Morning Post* urged the country to look

³³ Keller, *The Ultimate Spectacle*, xiv, original emphasis. Later on Keller reformulates a similar position: “The middle class addiction to visual sensation was the motor which charged authentic reportage, in spite of itself, with volatile surplus values.” Ibid., 38.

³⁴ In his study of cinema sound, James Lastra has suggested along similar lines that an investigation into sense-making (and in some cases truth-telling) is more pressing than denouncing mediatic representation as inherently falsifying. See his *Sound and the American Cinema: Perception, Representation, Modernity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 15.

³⁵ *Morning Post* (3 Oct. 1854), 4.

forward to peace and restored prosperity. It cautiously suggested that business as usual would soon be resumed throughout the Empire, while in Sevastopol, there ought to be a brisk clean-up operation, before British soldiers quit the region:

When we have done with the débris of the fortress, have cleared off our men, and disposed of our prisoners, we take it that we shall leave the shadow of peace to smile over the spot where now the quick strife of war follows the clang and *dash* of our soldiers.³⁶

However, four days after the *Morning Post* had reported the capture of the town, that same newspaper was obliged to retract, or rather change location: victory had been achieved on 20 September, but at Alma rather than Sevastopol. As the *Post* explained, the error was due to a telegram:

The truth is, that the inventor [of the story] has signalised himself in a manner which he only failed to make famous by the omission of his name, and that all the world may fairly be included in the list of believers in an achievement which the character and *dash* of the assailants made but too probable. The amended account of what did happen at Sevastopol is less plain than was the account of what, as it is proved, did not happen.³⁷

After this tortuous apology followed a series of renewed speculations. If Sevastopol had not yet been taken, then surely it was about to be, or perhaps it was being taken as the paper went to press. Such uncertainty stimulated journalistic invention: “[a]fter all,” the *Post*’s editor admitted, “in our present imperfect information, it is all imagination.”³⁸

Not until a few days later, when *The Times* published a blow-by-blow account from “special correspondent” William Howard Russell, were the events of 20 September established—fixed in the condition endlessly reported by historical

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid. In this quotation, as in the last, the mythical “dash” of British soldiers departs from the word’s traditional association with ranking officers and the aristocracy. We can track this changing meaning through the writings of Joachim Hayward Stocqueler, a contemporary journalist and entrepreneur, who suggested that dash was particular to Western soldiers: “For their system of military discipline, the Russians have to thank their Emperors. It makes soldiers, but fails to make them think and act like men. The soldier who is ignorant of the existence of everything outside his own company or division, can never have heroic courage, that self-confidence, that ‘dash,’ which distinguishes the soldiers of the West in the present struggle.” Stocqueler, *The British Soldier: An Anecdotal History* (London: Orr, 1856), 281.

³⁸ *Morning Post* (3 Oct. 1854), 4.

accounts even today.³⁹ It is worth rereading Russell for the audiovisual coordinates that enliven his report. As he recounted from within the British camp, the day began before dawn with the rousing of the army. The reveille did not sound: “They were marshalled silently; no bugles or drums broke the stillness, but the hum of a thousand voices rose loudly from the ranks, and the watch-fires lighted up the lines of our camp as though it were a great town.”⁴⁰ Tens of thousands of British and French troops marched along the Crimean coast, shadowed at sea by huge warships, until they arrived at the delta of the River Alma. Across this river, and high above them on a steep mountainside, was the Russian front line.

To create vividness in reporting on unfamiliar terrain, Russell compared the Alma delta with Richmond Hill, a site more familiar to Londoners.⁴¹ He invited readers to picture the enemy stationed on top of the mound and facing the Thames, and—adjusting for scale—imagine the river “shrunk to the size of a Hampshire rivulet.”⁴² By placing these well-known (and commonly represented) environs before his readers’ imaginations, Russell primed their senses for the battlefield actions he was about to narrate. Allied armies advanced across the flat land to the north. The generals rode in front, loudly cheered by the infantry. At 1:20 p.m. the first shells were launched from French ships; the Russians responded with heavy fire. Less than half an hour later, as the British began to descend into the valley, French and Turkish troops were already scaling the heights, making a surprise attack over a ridge—this was the famous attack depicted in Figure 3.3. But the climax of the battle came later in the afternoon, when the Guards crossed the river and began to storm the mountain:

Their line was almost as regular as though they were in Hyde Park. Suddenly a tornado of round and grape rushed through from the terrible battery, and a roar of musketry from behind thinned their front ranks by dozens. It was evident that we were just able to contend against the Russians, favoured as they were by a great position. At this very time an immense mass of Russian infantry were seen moving down towards the battery. They halted. It was the crisis of the day.

³⁹ See, for example, Andrew Lambert, *The Crimean War: British Grand Strategy against Russia, 1853–6* (London: Ashgate, 2013), 150–54.

⁴⁰ “Our special correspondent,” *The Times* (10 Oct. 1854), 7.

⁴¹ While views of the war proliferated in maps and prints, Londoners would have to wait until December for the first Crimean panorama. The earliest was Robert Burford’s Panorama in Leicester Square, where an impressive Battle of Alma opened in time for Christmas 1854. See Keller, *The Ultimate Spectacle*, 60–61.

⁴² “Our special correspondent,” *The Times* (10 Oct. 1854), 7.

Coming face to face with the enemy, Britain's Lord Raglan was forced to make a momentous decision. He chose to advance, swiftly bringing the battle to a conclusion and saving countless lives (or so Russell reported, in a rare moment of approbation for the army's commander-in-chief). When the British dead and wounded at Alma had been counted, their number was, Russell reported, just below 3,000.

With that imprecise figure, Russell's chronicle comes to a halt. His account presents readers with an overwhelmingly detailed narrative in which a huge cast of officers and (typically anonymous) soldiers—also horses, guns, and bullets—sporadically appear and then disappear amid the tumult. The boom of cannon, the whizz of round shot, the bursting of shells, with the noises associated with grape, Minié musketry, canister and case shot: all these are common within the unfolding events, sometimes emerging as the active subject of sentences. In the long passage cited a moment ago, a tornado of munitions “rushed” from the Russian battery, while the roar of musketry “thinned” the British line. These sound effects are intent on distracting us from human actors firing weapons. Our attention is diverted instead toward the impression the scene has on the columnist-observer. A journalistic reality effect is achieved through bearing witness to a hostile and unreadable multiplicity of bullets.

Russell rarely if ever mentions a high-ranking officer doing anything so unworthy as firing a gun. The class association of guns is conspicuous, leading us to wonder whether his focus on bullets and their noises stands in for the impossible-to-represent collective acts and experiences of the common soldiery.⁴³ After all, this representational dilemma was fundamental to elite war narratives in which, at least initially, heroic generals were said to have inspired troops to victory.⁴⁴ It was a political exclusion, of course: one premised on the notion of a country led into war, as elsewhere, by the upper classes. What's more, it was an ideology that became untenable as the war went on, as the ordinary, gentle but manly soldier emerged as the major player in Crimean War stories.⁴⁵ It was partly through the writings of Russell, and other pioneer war correspondents such as Thomas Chenery, that these alternative stories became

⁴³ Yuval Noah Harari detects a paradigm shift in the representation of the common soldier during the late eighteenth century, as “Western culture began for the first time to solicit and listen attentively to the authentic voices of the common soldiers themselves.” This new receptivity to soldiers' accounts coincided with the rise of what Harari's calls the “revelatory” interpretation of war, according to which the experience of battle granted soldiers access to higher spiritual and moral truths—truths barred to those who were not present. Harari, *The Ultimate Experience: Battlefield Revelations and the Making of Modern War Culture* (London: Palgrave, 2008), 190.

⁴⁴ Keller, *The Ultimate Spectacle*, 1–40.

⁴⁵ See Holly Furneaux, *Men of Feeling: Emotion, Touch and Masculinity in the Crimean War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 1–21.

well known. But for now, ordinary heroes would have to wait. Around the time of the Battle of Alma, low-born actions tended to be hidden within the crowded auditory channel. Much more conspicuous, and incongruous, was the bravery of the journalist and the kinds of looking and listening he performed in the act of bearing witness.

The figure of the war journalist arose as both target and cipher on London's travesty stages in late 1854. As a wartime medium, theater proved highly responsive to developments in Crimea, and so it was perhaps inevitable that the (relatively) novel presence of noncombatant battlefield correspondents would come in for satire and parody. Yet these on-stage journalists had strange, often humorously confusing implications for theatrical economies of representation. Particularly interesting for the purposes of this chapter is the synergy between journalists on stage and theatrical sound effects, especially when it came to representing battlefield noise. Sooner or later all of the city's theaters offered a Crimean spectacle; all of these shows were, to judge from the stage instructions, saturated with imitations of cannon fire.⁴⁶ Among the first to appear were shows at the Adelphi, Strand, Victoria, and Britannia Saloon, which were prompt to respond to Britain's declaration of war in March. In parallel with the music industry, theatrical productivity dropped over the summer, to be revived by news of Alma later in the year. The fresh tranche of plays made in response to Alma ranged from sentimental melodramas, such as the Surrey's *Bond of Love*, to the Marylebone's farcical *Sebastopol from Our Own Correspondent*, a play that led a trend for satirizing the presence of journalist noncombatants on the battlefield.⁴⁷

The Battle of Alma, at Astley's Royal Ampitheatre, followed suit in placing a journalist in a prominent role. The theater boasted the definitive Crimean show.⁴⁸ Astley's preeminence lay in its size—it could accommodate 2,500 spectators—and its specialization in military-equestrian shows: it was here that

⁴⁶ See for example, "The War in Turkey, or The Struggle for Liberty" (Apr. 1854, Britannia Saloon, British Library MS 52946 KK); R. B. Borough, "The Overland Journey to Constantinople" (Apr. 1854, Adelphi Theatre, British Library MS 52947 C); "Bartelemy" [Barthélémy Deville], "Le bombardement d'Odessa" (June 1854, Soho Theatre, British Library MS 52947 V); E. Stirling, "Sebastopol from Our Own Correspondent" (Oct. 1854, Marylebone Theatre, British Library MS 52949 Y); J. P. Simpson, "Schamyl, the Warrior Prophet" (Nov. 1854, Princess's Theatre, British Library MS 52950 D); F. F. Cooper, "The Soldier's Wife" (Nov. 1854, Strand Theatre, British Library MS 52950 W).

⁴⁷ The title of the Surrey's play was changed from *Bond of Love* to *Brothers in Arms* to *The Battle of Alma*; see William G. Knight, *A Major London "Minor": The Surrey Theatre, 1805–1865* (London: Blot, 1997), 253.

⁴⁸ Jacky Bratton, "Theatre of War: The Crimea on the London Stage," *Performance and Politics in Popular Drama*, ed. David Bradby, Louis James and Bernard Sharratt (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 119–38.

the Battle of Waterloo had been more or less consistently commemorated in theatrical simulation during the first half of the nineteenth century.⁴⁹ *The Battle of Alma* bid to outdo this precedent, its hyperbolic billboard promising accuracy of “costume, scenery, properties, decorations, and mechanical effects,” as well as reproduction of the battle’s “complicated ‘materiel.’”⁵⁰ There was to be a specially enlarged 700-foot stage to accommodate unseen numbers of troops and horses. Military auxiliaries included dozens of actively enlisted soldiers from the 1st Royal Fusiliers, while the band of the Coldstream Guards supplied an authentic musical soundtrack.⁵¹

Our trickster journalist makes his appearance near the outset of the show, which opens with a scene staged for real only months ago, as the Guards play the popular song “The Girl I Left behind Me” and British troops embark a steamer at Southampton docks. Aiming at the heartstrings, an emotional farewell between a private and his mother, father, wife, and young daughter (whose only line is “Goodbye Daddy”) ensues; and this scene is complemented by a lighthearted episode featuring Biddy Flanagan, a comic Irish woman, who recalls the sixteen husbands she has lost to the wars.⁵² Soliloquizing to the side of the stage, the journalist—yet to reveal himself as such—interjects, “Touching Scene! Must make a note of it. At this moment the signal is given to embark when an interesting Irish Female um-um-um.” Stage instructions record that, as his speech tapers off in ums, the journalist “writes in his pocketbook.” The purpose of his scribbling, as yet undisclosed, is revealed shortly afterward when the British commander asks the “person in Civil Garb” who he is:

My name is Montague Quillet Esquire by courtesy. My profession is literature. In fact, I’m a man of letters, a humble follower of Johnson, Hume, Pope and so forth, called by patriotism and the personal necessities of the hour, which are not worth mentioning. I have accepted the appointment of our own special correspondent at the seat of war, and I am anxious to be permitted to embark with the brave Army, share its toils, and record its glories. [...] My Lord I’m the humble but I hope the intelligent and faithful representative of the Encyclopedia of War and

⁴⁹ Helen Stoddart, *Rings of Desire: Circus History and Representation* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2000), 39.

⁵⁰ The billboard was quoted by the review of the show in *Morning Post* (24 Oct. 1854), 4.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² This script for the play, like all the others mentioned previously, survives in a handwritten version that was submitted for censorship. *The Battle of Alma* was received by the censor on October 21 1854; a license for the play to be performed was granted the same day. British Library, Add MS 52950 H

the Illustrated Blood and Murder Penny Herald, happy to book you for a week's subscription.⁵³

As Quillet and the soldiers make their way from Southampton to Constantinople, the scene cuts to the palace of Prince Alexander Sergeyevich Menshikov, the Finnish-Russian commander much maligned in the British press of the time. Like newspaper readers, Astley's audiences were presented with a Menshikov reckless, delusional, and eager for glory. He repeatedly shuns the appeals of his wife, who begs him not to resist the combined might of Britain and France, so committing a crime against humanity. However, Menshikov's greatest offense, at least in the play, is in sending false dispatches of surprise victories to the Tsar, who bestows honors on him and his men. Because of Menshikov, the Russians are plagued by a constant flow of misinformation—a view of the enemy perhaps calculated to reassure British audiences concerning their own imperfect knowledge of happenings abroad.⁵⁴ Through the constant referencing of news, both in Britain (scene 1) and Russia (scene 2), Menshikov comes to be formally contrasted with Quillet, thus setting up the usual tension between the villain and the comic, which later becomes a moral contest over the abuse of information.

A close interplay between fiction, recent history, and the news continues throughout the play: next stop in the recap of “real” events is Gallipoli, where the British passengers disembark at the Ottoman camp. What happens here can illustrate the complex nature of music and sound within this particular economy of theatrical representation. After some awkward mingling between British and French soldiers, a member of the Guards launches into a song in tribute to the alliance—the first component in a song-and-dance routine completed by a troupe of so-called Circassian girls. While further details of their “Grand Dance” are not supplied by the play's manuscript, its narrative framing—by an onstage audience of ogling British soldiers—makes clear its status as exotic entertainment. As the Circassians begin their dance, Quillet picks up his notebook and exclaims, “Here's a Scene for my new Spectacle!”—exhorting Astley's audiences to imagine the music and dance they are about to witness (and, by extension, *The Battle of Alma* as a whole) as a fictional byproduct of his “real” activities as a news correspondent.

My summary has so far stressed the dynamic absorption of contemporary news culture into the theater. As might already be obvious, what was absorbed at

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ One scene featured him premeditating false telegrams: “We shall crumple them up in a week. While Gorschikoff [based on Prince Mikhail Dmitrievich Gorchakov, Russian commander-in-chief in Moldovia and Wallachia] dates his dispatches from Calcutta to announce the conquest of the East I shall date mine from the Bank Parlour in the City of London.”

Astley's was not so much information already conveyed by newspapers, but the epistemological dilemma brought about by such knowledge. The doubt attending happenings abroad was an urgent problem in staging the play: at least two changes were made to the title and several substantial rewrites undertaken as uncertain news gradually became clear.⁵⁵ Within the play, as already mentioned, the untrustworthiness of media tends to be displaced onto the enemy and *their* regressive political system, while the British press—an embodiment of democratic if not liberal values—is seen to save England from a similar fate. These broader cultural aspirations emerge forcefully in the final act, which converts Quillet from a figure of fun into the play's unlikely hero. His moment of glory comes just before the final battle tableau. Taken prisoner by Menshikov, he protests by refusing to eat, declaring sympathy with starving Russian soldiers:

I would crave my liberty—As for the delicacies which your bounty has prepared for us I feel that it would ill become “our own correspondent” of the Illustrated Blood and Murder Penny Herald to eat of the fat of the Land while the brave Russian Army is condemned exclusively to the lean.

Thus *The Battle of Alma*—along with some other contemporary plays in London's theaters that put journalists in starring roles—exploited the novelty of the battlefield correspondent toward political and comic ends. Yet I want to suggest that Quillet can also serve as a reminder that what audiences were witnessing—the clamor of the fighting—had a reality outside the theater, and that it had been brought to Astley's via the newspapers.

In this half-light of the mediated public sphere, noisy special effects were particularly useful. On the one hand, such sounds encouraged audiences to imagine the battle being placed before them. As historian Jacky Bratton has argued, Astley's cultural role was to create “an image of the event which became its reality in the popular imagination.”⁵⁶ On the other, these sounds pointed beyond themselves, and we can see that the spectacle provided Londoners with something other than an exciting simulacrum. Through the eddying of journalism and theatrical effect, sounds were constantly suturing fiction to known events—and making them “realer” through contradistinction with their travesty on stage. Another case of this strange mimetic process followed from Quillet's moral triumph over Menshikov. A cannon booms and several gunshots are fired offstage: Menshikov cries, “Ha! The Battle has begun!” A Cossack officer then announces that French

⁵⁵ Bratton, “Theatre of War,” 128–29.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 130.

troops have already climbed the ridge near the Russians and “their ships of War bombard our position”—an echo of Russell’s report of what had only recently taken place on Alma’s heights. The officer’s yell (like Menshikov’s knowing cry) smacks of theatrical contrivance, to be sure. Yet it also cues an inversion of perspective, encouraging spectators to imagine the advancing British army through enemy ears and eyes.

Further echoes of newspaper coverage can be detected in the unusually specific instructions for special effects in the closing battlefield tableau:

The heights are seen crowded with Russian Artillery and Infantry—Ladies—and the Carriage of Prince Menshikov are also seen. Russian Riflemen descend from the heights—Cavalry ditto—and scour the stage and Arena—but cautiously as if watching the coming enemy—after a time the music changes to “the British Grenadiers” and then a French March—Cannon is heard—the Russian troops retire rapidly—the French and English troops enter the arena—the Rifles and Chasseurs leading it open order—And firing upon the retreating Russians—then the Cavalry—the Line—the Artillery—then more of the line—After a few manoeuvres they are formed and the Battle begins—The whole advances in line—firing as they go—the Russians come down again—A Grand Struggle between Cossacks and Cavalry—the Cossacks are driven back. As the English and French advances—the wounded are brought to the rear—the women and sailors attend them—band up their wounds and carry them off—Attack dies—A Caravan is dismounted—in fact all the incidents of war must be observed—Finally the British Commander appears to consult with the French General and one Grand Charge is ordered up the heights which are carried and cleared and the English and French colours hoisted amidst loud cheers and God save the Queen.⁵⁷

In this last scene, the complicated “materiel” promised on the show’s billboard was evidently on display. The *Morning Chronicle* reported that the “piece concludes with the storming of the heights of Alma, which, after a due

⁵⁷ J. H. [Joachim Hayward] Stocqueler, ““The Battle of the Alma: Grand Military Spectacle in Two Acts,” British Library, Manuscripts Collection (S2950 H). A full catalogue of theatrical manuscripts stored by the British Library and received for approval by the Lord Chamberlain between 1852 and 1863 is available online: <<https://www.royalholloway.ac.uk/dramaandtheatre/research/researchprojects/lordchamberlainsplays/thelordchamberlainsplays,1852-1863.aspx>>, accessed 25 Apr. 2015.

consumption of gunpowder and a terrific loss in killed and wounded, are gallantly taken at the point of bayonet.”⁵⁸ Along similar lines, though lavishing more attention on the kinds of ordnance on offer, the *Morning Post* wrote that in this last scene the firing “becomes formidable, and, amid the roar of musketry and the exploding of mines, shells are thrown from one side to the other.”⁵⁹ We can round out this soundscape by adding noises mentioned in the script: the shouts of soldiers, the clatter of hooves, the singing of the national anthem by chorus and perhaps audience, and of course the musical contributions of the Coldstream band.

We can only guess what contributions the band made, or what role their music might have played in relation to other sounds in the theater. Looking back with twenty-first-century ears, we might try to feel our way into the past by imagining the Coldstream band as a film soundtrack. In such an audio-visual scenario, music embraces other sounds within the fictional world while occupying a space just outside it. Sometimes labeled non-diegetic music, it functions as a binding agent, drawing into itself the disparate sounds occasioned by dialogue, props, and other noises. The Coldstream band might conceivably have fulfilled this binding function. But there are many other possibilities here. As I have noted, “real” bandsmen brought military music into the theater, embodying the movement of sound from Crimea into the show. And this embodiment in turn enabled—or at least allowed for the possibility of—an imaginative projection back there. The Coldstream’s music, like noises produced by elaborately described bullets, propelled the show 3,000 miles east, weeks into the past, to a remote Crimean elsewhere.

Within the crucible of Astley’s Theatre, the disparate sounds examined in this chapter came into contact. *The Battle of the Alma* made audible the battlefield reported by newspapers, and in the process was itself transformed into a complex mediatic node (if not a news medium in its own right). Drums, bugles, gunshots, bands, and marches—all conventional military signifiers—signaled toward a distant reality as they were joined with plots that playfully turned on media emblems: false telegrams; the earnest pronouncements of a journalist; the shout of a Cossack. There are both similarities and important differences between the kind of reality effect created here, in the theater, and the representation of gunshots in piano music and in journalism. In the theater, sound stimulated the imagination of news in a general sense; on the page, and in the home, sound functioned more as a phatic index, as particular

⁵⁸ *The Morning Chronicle* (24 Oct. 1854), 3.

⁵⁹ *The Morning Post* (24 Oct. 1854), 4.

noises impossibly attempted (as though urged on by a journalistic moral imperative) to mark the fact that “this” happened, there and then. Yet comparisons of this kind are, in the end, less important than the networked relationships between them: the links between newspaper, theater, and printed music—between eye, ear, and finger—which elevated gunshots to a pervasive cultural theme.

What can such a network, the evidence of such sensorial networking, tell us? Can it say anything about a broader condition of wartime as it was felt? Sound as an abstract quality or generic domain of experience means little here, or is endlessly fractured by the different audiences and the different kinds of listening engendered by a newspaper article, a piano piece, or a military-equestrian melodrama. Yet, across these coarsely linked sites of representation, if in dissimilar ways, particular sounds may have served a vital role. This may be due to the ambiguity inherent in the resonant materiality of signifiers of sounds, an ambiguity that can be productive. Whether sonic signifiers are verbal (perhaps silently read and imagined), musical, or even sounds themselves, such ambiguity can allow us to break with the story, to crumble distinctions between here/there and then/now, even to create a bridge between spaces and times. There were no doubt multiple motives in opening sonic portals of this kind during the Crimean War, not all of them aimed at promoting empathy and cosmopolitanism. Indeed, the fetishistic nature of bullets and their sounds in Russell’s journalism—as in *The Battle of Alma* and in the piano pieces I have discussed—may lead us to suspect that gunfire held less than ethical fascinations for mid-century British Victorians. Through its insistence across and between diverse sites, these sounds seem to grasp at the untouchable, to attempt to take command over the dangerous power of the war’s munitions.

And so to say that sound mimicked the battlefield can be only part of the story. Mimicry fluidly converted into mimesis: into what Michael Taussig once described as the power to bring distant things close by way of their replicas. For Taussig, mimesis is “the faculty to copy, imitate, make models, explore difference, yield into and become other”—it constantly reminds us of the entanglement of subjects and objects, a prior state of mixture that is awkward for rational systems of knowledge to accept, or even acknowledge.⁶⁰ So it is that post-Enlightenment subjects constantly disavow their own mimesis, projecting its allure onto primitive peoples and *their* savage ways of thinking.

Whether taking its flight through the air, or encountering more solid obstacles, a round shot of course must be always obeying strict, natural

⁶⁰ Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity*, xiii.

laws, and must work out the intricate reckoning enjoined by conflict of power with absolute, servile exactness; but between the “composition” of “forces” maintained in our physical world and the fixed resolve of a mind made up under warring motives there is always analogy, with even sometimes strange resemblance; and to untutored hearers a formula set down in algebra would convey less idea of the path of a hindered, though not vanquished cannonball than would the simple speech of a savage who, after tracing its course (as only savages can), has called it a demon let loose. For not only does it seem to be armed with a mighty will, but somehow to govern its action with ever-ready intelligence, and even to have a “policy.” The demon is cruel and firm; not blindly, not stupidly obstinate.⁶¹

This was how Alexander Kinglake described the experience of coming under fire in his magisterial, eight-volume *The Invasion of the Crimea* (1863–87), which remains the most important English-language chronicle of the war. The “strange resemblance” he perceived between the phenomenology and the physics of a flying cannonball sheds light on the sounds I have been unearthing in this chapter. For while sound does not feature much in this passage, the unintelligible yet perfectly comprehensible speech of “a savage” signals a bizarre, now alien, representational strategy for missiles and the damage they do. More than a period detail of British imperial consciousness, Kinglake’s primitive voices betoken an awareness of the fate of bodies in industrial warfare.

A point of comparison may be with the deranged speech of British, German, and other soldiers returning from the First World War: a pathological utterance understood through medical discourses of traumatic neurosis and male hysteria.⁶² Such categories and definitions were incipient at the time of the Crimean War in the shape of industrial diseases such “railway spine,” but had yet to be transferred to battlegrounds of Alma, Inkerman, and Sevastopol. Historical and political conditions were not conducive to mapping industry onto war, and were to remain so for more than a century: campaigns for the medical recognition of trauma caused by industrial warfare continued intermittently until well after the Second World War. Not until 1980, in the wake of the Vietnam War, was post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) accepted as a clinical concern by medical

⁶¹ Alexander Kinglake, *The Invasion of the Crimea: Its Origin, and an Account of Its Progress Down to the Death of Lord Raglan*, vol. 8 ([new ed.], London: Blackwood and Sons, 1888), 151.

⁶² Daniel Lerner, *Hysterical Men: War, Psychiatry, and the Politics of Trauma in Germany, 1890–1930* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003), 61–62.

institutions such as the American Psychiatric Association. The modern notion of trauma is glossed by historian Ruth Leys:

. . . owing to the emotions of terror and surprise caused by certain events, the mind is split or disassociated: it is unable to register the wound to the psyche because the ordinary mechanisms of awareness and cognition are destroyed. [. . .] The experience of the trauma, fixed or frozen in time, refuses to be represented *as* past, but is perpetually re-experienced in a painful, dissociated, traumatic present.⁶³

As Leys observes, PTSD, both as an illness and as a wider representational strategy, has by now become pervasive within many cultures across the globe. Not confined to a set of bodily symptoms, PTSD is “fundamentally a disorder of memory,” one that deeply effects our narratives and experiences of wartime today.⁶⁴

Back in the 1850s, trauma may thus seem to us conspicuous by its absence. Of course, it is not hard to find people who were horribly traumatized by the war; there are even those who exhibited classic symptoms of trauma, such as hypervigilance and loss of affect.⁶⁵ But in an age before “trauma” there were different representational strategies to accommodate these people: other means by which to select, inscribe, and recall battlefield experience. I have already mentioned the nineteenth-century British political context that initially favored representation of heroic deeds of the upper classes and only later in the war tilted toward non-elite experience. Holly Furneaux has demonstrated the crucial role of gender in shaping these Crimean War narratives, which recast military masculinity in stories that emphasized acts of kindness and self-sacrifice.⁶⁶ Yet another way in which pre-traumatic experience of the battlefield could be narrated, as we have seen, was through sound: through a networked web of medially differentiated symbols that both recognized and disavowed battlefield realities.

A broad conclusion for this chapter, and media network it has unearthed, is that sounds carried implications for wartime memory, giving structure to contemporary battlefield experience through its dialectical relationship with distant sensations and archives. While these “experiences” are unrecoverable, then as

⁶³ Ruth Leys, *Trauma: A Genealogy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 2.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ James J. Reid, *Crisis of the Ottoman Empire: Prelude to Collapse 1839–1878* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 2000), 406–15, 431–35.

⁶⁶ Furneaux, *Men of Feeling*, 1–21.

now, we can observe the ways in which Britons in the 1850s dealt with this representational crisis as a material practice. In other words, wartime experience and its narration was transformed through printed music and other memorial matter, which inscribed and archived events of their moment. Copiously if not compulsively churned out, such printed matter attests to a formidable archival impulse in British culture of the mid-nineteenth century—one not specific to, but nevertheless spurred on by the Crimean War. Yet amid the mountainous buildup of paper, we can also observe the workings of wartime memory on a much smaller scale, sometimes in minute peculiarities of documents.

I am conscious that this mode of uncovering larger habits of mind in obscure details will not appeal to everyone who reads this chapter. I have already given plenty of examples in this vein. Yet consider one last piece of music—this time a song with piano accompaniment—published as the Crimean War entered its final stages in early 1856. By this point, victory for the allies seemed all but guaranteed, and already we can detect the campaign beginning to slip into the historical past. In the world of sheet music, as elsewhere, the dominant mood began to shift (somewhat ahead of unfolding events) from celebration to reminiscence: countless commemorative songs were published whose lyrics referred to episodes of the war in the past tense.⁶⁷ Among the many was “Whistling Dick,” a song that recorded in a mock colloquial idiom the characteristic cry of the battlefield:

We thought it sport, as from each port
The shells flew pretty quick,
'My eyes,' cried Bill, 'Look out my boys
For here comes Whistling Dick!'

Released in May, before the war was over, “Whistling Dick” both set to music and committed to paper the sailor’s exclamation to warn of incoming round

⁶⁷ Henry Farmer and Edward Farmer, “The Battle of the Alma” (London: Leoni Lee, 1855); Stephen Glover and Henry Abrahams, “A Voice Was Heard in England” (London: D’Almaine, 1855); Frederick R Shrivall and H. Montagu, “Alma, ’Tis Sweet for Our Country to Die,” a musical number from *A Trip to the Crimea: A New Musical Entertainment* (London, Addison Hollier & Lucas, 1857). There are several much later songs that commemorate the Crimean War—for example, James Smyth, “The Warrior’s Return from the Crimea” (London: Lafleur & Sons. 1874)—as well as some printed later that purported to date from the time: Matthew Henry Weetman, “England’s Bygone Days: Song Composed at the Siege of Sebastopol by British Soldiers” (London: B. Williams); Charles Osborne, “On Duty: A Tale of the Crimea” (London: R. Maynard, 1893); Samuel Liddle, sung by Mr. Plunkett Green, “The Kerry Recruit (An Irish Recruiting Song of the Time of the Crimean War)” (London: Stainer & Bell, 1938).

shot. The cry itself was illustrated on the front cover (see Figure 3.5a) and further explained by a note at the top of the first page (see Figure 3.5b):

These shells have done our works and guns much damage; but the Sailors, who are principally treated to these agreeable missiles, have got quite accustomed to them. “Bill” cries one fellow to another “look out, here comes ‘Whistling Dick!’” Vide Russell’s correspondence from the Crimea.

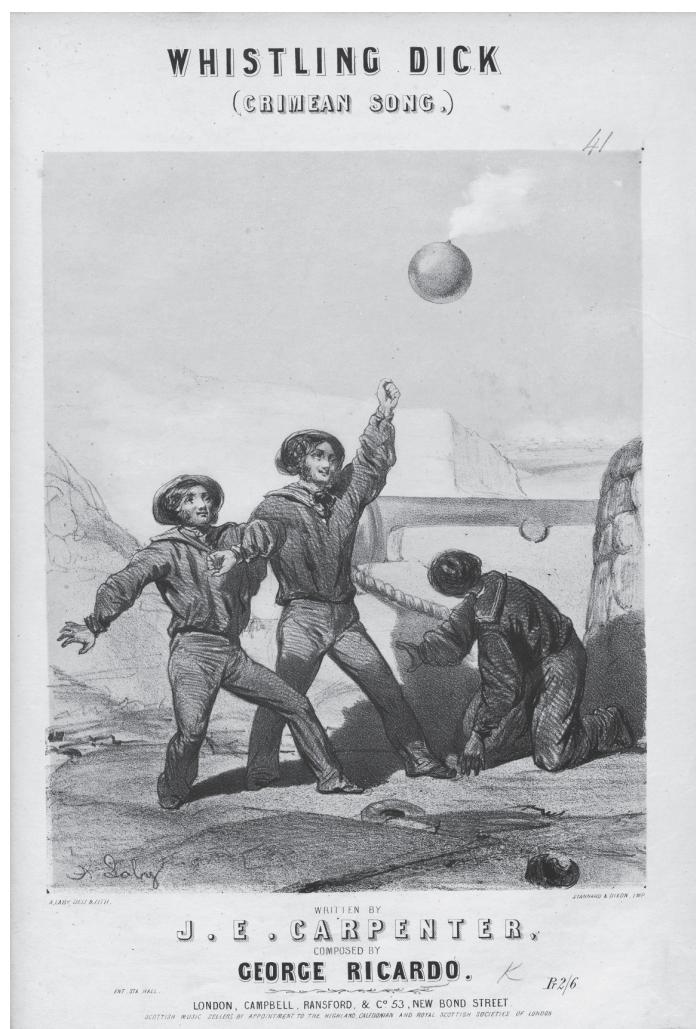


Figure 3.5a George Ricardo and J. E. Carpenter, “Whistling Dick (Crimean Song).” London: Campbell, Ransford, 1856: cover image. © British Library Board h.1764.(41.); reproduced with permission.

**** WHISTLING DICK.**

** These shells have done our works and guns much damage; but the Sailors, who are principally treated to these agreeable missiles, have got quite accustomed to them. "Bill" cries one fellow to another "look out, here comes 'Whistling Dick!'"
Vide Russell's correspondence from the Crimea.

WRITTEN BY J.E. CARPENTER. COMPOSED BY G. RICARDO.

VOICE VERY BOLD.

MODERATO.

PIANO *f*

FORTE.

Figure 3.5b J. E. Carpenter and George Ricardo, "Whistling Dick (Crimean Song)." London: Campbell, Ransford, 1856: 1; upper half of the page. © British Library Board h.1764.(41.); reproduced with permission.

This detail reveals that, as the patina of history was being applied—before the war had been won—the link between Crimea and London, via newspaper report and piano transcription, came to be memorialized in a bow to Russell. Before long "Whistling Dick," like so much other sheet music, was itself to be pressed into Britain's national archive. It discloses a society organizing its memories in creating a monument to the savage, who heard demons let loose in the flight of cannon.